



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Republic of Korea Air Force F-35A Pilot Takes First Flight

944th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. -- The first Republic of Korea Air Force F-35A pilot soared into history for his country when he took to the skies July 20 at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

After a year of preparation and instruction through the 944th Operations Group Detachment 2, Lockheed Martin and their active duty team members at the 56th Fighter Wing, Maj. Kiyun Jung, ROKAF F-35A pilot, flew his first solo mission.

"This flight is a huge milestone for the Republic of Korea, and for us to be a part of that is an amazing honor because we realize the magnitude of this event for both countries," said Lt. Col. Eric Puels, 944th OG Det. 2 commander. "For us to be able to forge these relationships and get to know these pilots during their journey toward fifth generation airpower is incredible."



A Republic of Korea Air Force F-35A crew member and Maj. Kiyun Jung, ROKAF F-35A pilot communicate July 20, before take-off at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

Jung prepared for this flight through months of intensive academic, simulator, and hands-on training with the 944th OG Det. 2 and the 56th FW.

"I felt so excited for this flight, and because of my instruction, this aircraft felt familiar and I was able to have a smooth experience," said Jung. "This is my job and it felt great to finally take-off and work on becoming the best F-35 pilot I can be. My goals moving forward as an F-35 pilot is to lead and teach my fellow pilots in Korea to become the best in the world."

During the historical event, ROKAF, 944th and 56th FWs and Lockheed Martin staff all worked together to ensure a safe and efficient flight for Jung.

"It's very rewarding to work with and witness these pilots grow through the course," said Maj. Michael Hobbson, 944th OG Det. 2 chief of training and ROK flying course manager. "Over the past year, I've been involved with not only creating and executing their course material, but working with their leaders in Korea and helping them to have the best possible experience in our country as they worked toward this point where we were able to take that first flight today."

"Each of us in the wings played an important part in making this momentous event happen; civilian and Airmen alike," said Lt. Col. Jason Bartels, 56th Operations Group Foreign Military Sales director. "Many others in Pacific Air Forces, Korea, and the F-35 Joint Program Office also contributed to arrive at today. Together we are building the future of airpower not only for the United States, but with our great allies around the world. I am proud and humbled to see our two nations work together and build closer ties in the world's most advanced fighter."

Jung is the first student in the Korean chapter of flight training for the five year FMS program. Two more classes of ROK students are scheduled to be trained as F-35A pilots.